

This Week in Congress

December 5, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I did not send out a newsletter last week due to the Thanksgiving holiday, so this week's newsletter covers activities from the past two weeks. Congress reconvenes this week and is expected to be in session until mid-December. I hope you find this useful.

Southwest Kansas Events Focus on Veterans and Community Health Centers

On Tuesday, November 22, I hosted a forum for veterans in Cimarron to discuss health care and benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Tom Sanders, Director of the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center, and Charles Woolford, Director of the Robert J. Dole VA Regional Office, joined me to hear the thoughts and concerns of veterans at the event. This is the sixth forum I have hosted on veterans' issues. Other forums have been held in Sabetha, Salina, Clay Center, Goodland and Hutchinson.

About 75 veterans participated in the forum for a discussion on costs of prescription drugs, new medical technology being built at the Dole VA Hospital in Wichita and the quality of care veterans receive from staff at the Ft. Dodge Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

Our country owes a tremendous debt to veterans. This forum was an opportunity to hear

directly from our veterans about their needs and the challenges they face, so that we may do a better job of providing them with the highest quality of care possible. Thank you to Sara McFarland and the staff at the Cimarron Library for their hospitality, and also to Kelly Clark, Cimarron American Legion Commander.

On Wednesday, November 30, I visited the United Methodist Mexican-American Ministries Community Health Center in Garden City, where Penny Schwab gave Dennis Mesa of Senator Sam Brownback's office and me a tour of the facility. We had the opportunity to meet members of the staff and discuss the importance of funding for community health centers.

The health center in Garden City serves the entire southwest Kansas area by providing prenatal care, AIDS education, preventive medicine, nutrition and diet information, as well as dental and immigration services. This is a prime example of why health care centers are vital in rural Kansas. I recently voted against the 2006 funding bill for the Department of Health and Human Services because it included inadequate funding for community health centers, rural health and primary health care programs. This funding bill now goes back to a conference committee, where House and Senate negotiators hopefully will revise it and agree on better funding levels.

Presenting Ramona with the Building Better Communities Award

I recently recognized the citizens of Ramona for their successful community revitalization efforts with my "Building Better Communities" award. In addition to celebrating the citizens of Ramona, I also helped celebrate the grand opening of Ramona's newest business, the Barbershop Gallery.

This town of 100 people has reestablished its roots by rebuilding community landmarks. Led by Pat Wick and Jessica Gilbert, revitalization efforts have included the opening of a bed and breakfast, a lodge and a museum honoring Ramona's pioneer history. Community involvement through several new civic and community events can also be attributed to the community's revitalization. Ramona now hosts a spring tea party, a citywide Memorial Day service, a Main Street Fourth of July parade, a scarecrow parade to celebrate Halloween and at Christmas a festival of lights and outdoor nativity.

I established the "Building Better Communities" award to showcase positive community action in Kansas. Ongoing efforts to revitalize Ramona are an example of how hard work and vision can create such an opportunity.

I also recognized Ramona's efforts in a statement to the House of Representatives. For a full text of that speech, visit here: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp110305BBCRamona.html .

Expressing Opposition to a Congressional Pay Increase

These past two weeks, I have heard from several Kansans concerned about members of Congress receiving an increase in pay. I voted against members of Congress receiving the increase. Congress is required by Article I, Section 6, of the U.S. Constitution to determine its own pay. Under existing law, a cost-of-living increase is automatic unless Congress enacts legislation blocking the cost of living adjustment. I do not support this law, and I believe the process should be reformed. I have frequently voiced my opposition to the cost-of-living adjustment.

The procedural vote to eliminate the automatic increase for members of Congress occurred on June 28, 2005. What I indicated that day, as printed in the Congressional Record, remains true today:

"I rise to voice my opposition to the existing law that provides an automatic annual cost-of-living pay increase for members of Congress..., I object to the process and believe it should be reformed. Failure to allow an up or down vote on this issue only serves to increase cynicism towards the political process and confirms the feeling of many...that their representatives are out of touch. The American public deserves better..."

To read the full text of the speech, visit here: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp062805MemberCOLA.html .

Meeting with Kansas Livestock Producers at the KLA Annual Convention

I joined members of the Kansas Livestock Association for its annual convention in Wichita on Thursday, December 10, to visit with individual cattlemen from across Kansas. The convention was an opportunity for me to catch up with numerous Kansans involved in the livestock industry.

The discussion with many producers was about progress being made on lifting the Japanese ban on American beef. This market has been closed since the Japanese blocked U.S. beef due to a single case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy in 2003. In those two years I have worked hard with producers to push the Japanese to reopen its border. I introduced a resolution that includes 88 other Members of Congress and calls for economic sanctions to be used against Japan should they continue to delay and disregard earlier agreements. I have also testified during a House Ways and Means Committee hearing on Japanese trade, met with the Japanese ambassador and visited with the President to express the support of over 100 Members of Congress in making this issue his highest economic priority. I am encouraged by recent actions by the Japanese to reestablish the beef trade, possibly within the next few weeks.

Discussing Rural Health Care Issues at Southwest Medical Center

On Tuesday, November 29, I visited the Southwest Medical Center in Liberal where I met with Tony Daigle, hospital administrator, and DeLany Fawkes, chief financial officer. I joined Tony and DeLany for a tour of the 89-bed facility and to discuss some of the challenges this rural hospital is facing.

The outlook for Southwest Medical Center is positive. Daigle reported that the medical center has successfully addressed some of its budget issues and has significantly cut back on costs. He said they are also continuing their reputation for quality service. We also discussed automation of medical records, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement and options for patients in rural areas.

I appreciated my time with the administrator and chief financial officer and was glad to be at Southwest Medical Center again. These meetings keep me informed on what challenges hospitals in the First District are facing. The feedback I receive guides my efforts in Congress to

improve rural health care.

Discussing Rural Housing Needs in Kansas Communities

I recently had the opportunity to visit with housing developers Jack and Jay Manske of Wichita, along with R.A. Edwards, Keith Hughes and Mike Pritchett with First National Bank of Hutchinson. The Manskies and First National Bank have worked to develop and finance affordable housing in Kansas communities through use of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. We discussed how the alternative minimum tax is gradually decreasing the benefit of these tax credits and thus limiting investment in rural housing projects. The development of affordable, quality housing plays an important role in the quality of life in our Kansas communities. Our federal tax code should not discourage this needed investment.

Speaking at the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention

I joined members of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts for their annual convention in Wichita on Monday, November 21. I expressed the need for their input as Congress develops the next Farm Bill, which will place a larger emphasis on conservation and environmental issues. While there, I had the opportunity to meet with many employees from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. I recently worked with these organizations in conducting my annual conservation tour. This year's southwest Kansas tour was successful in large part due to their assistance and efforts.

Learning about RV Manufacturing in Smith Center

On Friday, December 2, I visited Peterson Industries in Smith Center. Employing 160 people, this RV manufacturer is the largest employer in Smith County. This homegrown company was formed in 1966 by Leonard and Blanche Peterson and their son, Vaughn. They now manufacture a wide variety of recreational vehicles and are one of the most respected names in the RV Industry. I joined CEO Vaughn Peterson, President Bryan Tillett and Vice President Kelly Lyon to discuss issues affecting small manufacturing businesses in Kansas, including concerns about health care costs and the need to expand the available workforce.

Visiting Kansas Schools, Businesses and Community Members

Since Congress was out of session for the Thanksgiving holiday week and this past week, I spent time traveling to various communities in the district to visit businesses and schools and meet with community members.

I made stops in Jetmore and Eskridge where community members shared with me issues facing each of these small towns, as well as concerns about fuel prices and health care costs. In Jetmore, I visited the local cafe, courthouse, city hall, local newspaper and the county Farm Service Agency office. In Eskridge, I stopped by the Senior Center, Flint Hills Bank, Annie Mae's Cafe, Rush Inn convenience store, the library, post office and Heritage Village nursing home.

I helped begin celebration of the Christmas season by participating in the annual Russell Christmas Parade, of which I have been a part for many years. I enjoyed visiting with many community members before and after the parade. I also recently joined the Cimarron Rotary Club to speak about the congressional agenda and learn about the club's civic involvement.

I visited the Farm Credit Central Kansas office in Wichita this week where we discussed the farm economy, the next Farm Bill, the role of grain-based fuels in the ag economy and the need to make certain that the agriculture industry and rural America have access to credit.

I met with elementary, middle and high school students, teachers and administrators throughout the district over the last two weeks to learn about school activities and discuss the federal government's role in education. I spoke to high school government students in Dodge City and Scott City, joined a seventh grade language arts class in Hugoton and read "Winter's Gift" to the fourth grade classes of Belleville East Elementary School. I also stopped in Salina to visit with the president of Kansas Wesleyan University, Dr. Philip Kerstetter. Dr. Kerstetter and I discussed financial aid and other higher education issues.

In the Office

In my Hays office recently was Luke Lohrmeyer of Ellis and his mother, Amy, to talk about H.R. 583, the Arthritis Prevention, Control and Cure Act. Eleven-year old Luke has juvenile arthritis and visited with me about his condition and this legislation. I am encouraged by this young man, who is a great example of our youth's willingness to get involved and raise awareness about issues that affect their lives. Since meeting with Luke, I have now become a sponsor of this legislation. Also visiting my Hays office was Mark Karleskint of Hays to talk about the business of UPS and issues important to him and his fellow employees.

Pat Hanrahan of Wichita and Rob Mackey, formerly of Hutchinson, were in my Washington, D.C., office representing United Way to discuss charitable tax incentives and the nationwide 2-1-1 telephone call referral service. Robyn Schmid of Colby was also in this week with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

In my office this week for a tour of the Capitol building were Jim Walt and Dana Adams of Hays with their children, Dakota and Colton, and Louis and Michele Martens of Buhler. Brad and Cynthia Kraft of Emporia were also in with their sons, William and Andrew, as were Jim and Bette Krakau of Atlanta, Georgia, with their children, Jenna and Alex.

Very truly yours,

Jerry